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PLAIN 3128a65  
 DIRECTIONS  
 FOR  
 READING  
 THE  
 HOLY SCRIPTURES.

*Homily upon Reading the Holy Scriptures.*

There is nothing that more maintaineth Godliness of the Mind, and driveth away Ungodliness, than doth the continual Reading and Hearing of God's word, if it be joined with a godly Mind, and a good Affection to know and follow God's Will. For without a single Eye, pure Intent, and good Mind, nothing is allowed for Good before God. And on the other side, nothing more darkeneth CHRIST and the Glory of God, nor bringeth in more Blindness, and all Kinds of Vices, than doth the Ignorance of God's Word.

THE EIGHTH EDITION.

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Homily upon Reading the  
H O L Y S C R I P T U R E S.

**A**S they that are sick of an Ague,  
whatsoever they eat or drink,  
(though it be never so pleasant) yet  
it is as bitter to them as Wormwood;  
not for the Bitterness of the Meat,  
but for the corrupt and bitter Hu-  
mour that is in their Tongue and  
Mouth, Even so is the Sweetness  
of God's Word bitter, not of itself,  
but only unto them that have their  
Minds corrupted with long Custom  
of Sin, and Love of this World.

In reading God's Word, he most profiteth that is most turned into it, that is, most inspired with the Holy Ghost, most in his Heart and Life altered and changed into that Thing which he readeth. He that is daily less and less proud, less wrathful, less covetous, and less desirous of worldly and vain Pleasures.

Although other Sciences be good, and to be learned, yet no Man can deny but this (the Knowledge of God's Word) is the *chief*, and passeth all other incomparably. What Excuse shall we therefore make at the last Day before Christ, that delight to read or hear Mens Phantasies and Inventions more than his most Holy Gospel? and will find no Time to do that, which chiefly (above all Things) we should do? and will  
rather



rather read other Things than that  
for the which we ought rather to  
leave Reading of all other Things?

Ignorance of God's Word is the  
Cause of all Error, as Christ himself  
affirmed to the Sadduces. How  
should they then eschew Error, that  
will be still Ignorant? And how  
should they come out of Ignorance,  
that will not read nor hear that  
Thing which should give them  
Knowledge?

Read it humbly, with a meek  
and lowly Heart, to the Intent you  
may glorify God, and not yourself,  
with the Knowledge of it; and read  
it not without daily Praying to God,  
that he would direct your Reading  
to good Effect; and take upon you  
to expound it no further than you  
can plainly understand it. " For


(as St *Augustine* says) “ the Know-  
 “ ledge of Holy Scripture is a great,  
 “ large, and a high Palace, but the  
 “ Door is very low, so that the  
 “ high and arrogant Man cannot  
 “ run in; but he must stoop low,  
 “ and humble himself, that shall  
 “ enter into it.” *Presumption* and  
*Arrogance* is the Mother of all Error;  
 and *Humility* needeth to fear no Er-  
 ror. *Chrysostom* says, “ That Man’s  
 “ human and worldly Wisdom or  
 “ Science, leadeth not to the Under-  
 “ standing of Scripture;” but the  
 Revelation of the Holy Ghost, who  
 inspireth the true Meaning unto  
 them, that with Humility and Di-  
 ligence do search therefore.





PLAIN  
DIRECTIONS

For READING the  
HOLY SCRIPTURES.

✱  ✱ SINCE God of his Fatherly Goodness hath revealed himself, and the Way to eternal Life, in the Holy Scriptures; it is certainly the Duty of every Christian, to study the same with all Seriousness and Application. But then he ought to study them after such a Manner, as may enable him thereby to obtain a saving *Knowledge of Christ*, that, as the Scripture itself expressed it, he may be thereby made "wise unto Salvation, thro' " Faith, which is in Christ Jesus (a)."

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§. 2. When

(a) 2 Tim. iii. 15.

## *Plain Directions*

§. 2. When therefore any Person resolves to read the Scriptures of the Old or New Testament, with a sincere Desire to have his Soul wrought upon, reformed and improved by it, with a saving Knowledge of Jesus Christ; the following *Plain Directions* may, by the Blessing of God, prove serviceable for that End.

§. 3. That a serious Reader of the divine Scriptures, may the better prepare himself for attaining that End, for which the Scripture is given; he ought in the first Place to lay aside all manner of sinister By-Ends, apt to intrude into the best and most sacred Performances. He must watch all the Motions of his Heart, lest some irregular End should secretly move him, and beguiling him under some false Pretence or other, turn his Mind from that Christian Simplicity, which is so necessary for the profitable Reading of the Scriptures. If this Caution be neglected, and the Reader influenced by uncertain Designs in so pious an Exercise, then he must needs fall short of that Benefit, which would undoubtedly accrue to his Soul, if he did perform so useful a Work with due Care and Application,

*for Reading the Scriptures.* 9

plication, like a faithful and attentive Disciple of our Saviour.

§. 4. It was one of those false and selfish Ends, that influenced the Pharisees of old, and hindered them from reaping that saving Effect from the Study of Scripture, which, to a well-disposed Reader, is offered therein. They seemed indeed to search the Scriptures with extraordinary Care and Nicety; but missing the principal End for which the Scripture is given, they continued under the reigning Power of Sin; and all the laborious Searches they made in the Letter thereof, came to nothing. Nay they even turned that into Poison, which, if well digested, would have proved wholesom Nourishment for the Good of their Souls. The Cause of this unprofitable Way of Reading the Scripture, is intimated by our Lord, when he tells them, "They thought  
" to have eternal Life in the Scriptures :  
" but they would not come to Christ,  
" that they might have life (*b*);" that is, that they might be justified by his Merit, cleansed by his Blood, born again by his Spirit, sanctified by his Grace, and so  
A 5 saved

(*b*) John v. 39.

saved in that Order and Method, which the Lord hath prescribed in his Word.

§. 5. This Incompliance of the Scribes and Pharisees with the Terms of Salvation required by Jesus Christ, proved the very Cause of their eternal Ruin. They imagined they might inherit the Kingdom of God, barely by searching the Writings of *Moses* and of the Prophets, without coming to Christ, or believing in his Name. They rejected his Person and Doctrine, for worldly Honour and Interest: And therefore the Lord told them plainly, that "they should  
" perish and die in their Sins (c)." This being the common Doom of all false Professors and Hypocrites, who, whilst they dwell and rest upon the Letter and Outside of the Scriptures, despise that divine Order and Method, wherein Life and Salvation is only to be obtained.

§. 6. Another false Step in the Study of the Scriptures, is taken by those who read the Bible with no other Intent than  
" to pick out something to entertain  
" their Fancy, and to pass away the  
" Time,

(c) John viii. 21, 24.



*for Reading the Scriptures.* 11

“ Time, for want of other Employ-  
“ ment.” Human Reason is, after the  
Fall of Man, become so wanton and  
extravagant, as even to nourish Sin and  
Vanity, by what is designed to subdue  
it. The natural Man, notwithstanding  
all the Imbellishments, Study and Art  
can give him, will now dwell upon the  
Surface of Histories recorded in Scrip-  
ture. He will entertain and please his  
Fancy with a Multitude of Speculations,  
raised on all manner of Subjects. He  
takes the Scripture for a large Field, in  
which he may expatiate at Pleasure, and  
let loose his Imagination upon any Text  
that comes in his Way : But whilst he  
neglects the Spiritual Use and Application  
thereof, properly tending to the Conver-  
sion of his Soul, the Word doth neither  
enlighten his Understanding, nor sanctify  
his Will and Affections.

§. 7. Another false Step in reading  
the Bible, is taken by those that look  
upon the Perusal of the Scripture, “ as  
“ a meer outward Duty or Task, to the  
“ Performance whereof they think them-  
“ selves obliged by the Law of God,  
“ without having due Regard to the  
“ gracious



“gracious Invitation and Encouragement thereunto given them in the Gospel.” If there was no Law, they would not mind the Study of the Scripture, nor perhaps any religious Exercise at all. As all the Works of such Men are soured by legal Views and Compulsions, so is their reading the Scripture much of the same Nature. They are not born of the Word of the Gospel, and so it is no Wonder they do not taste its Sweetness or Virtue. But such as are born again of the Word, as of a living Seed, do also desire to grow thereby, as by sincere, or pure, wholesom and nourishing Milk. To these “the Word is sweeter than Honey and the Honeycomb, and more desirable than Gold and much fine Gold.” They taste the Power of the Gospel, and are animated thereby, both to a serious Search after the divine Promises contained in Scripture, and likewise to the diligent and constant Practice of such Christian Virtues and Duties as depend thereon.

§. 8. Therefore those who read the Scripture upon no better Principle than that of a bare Task, Custom, or Constraint,

straint, cannot receive any solid or real Advantage from such a slight Performance. Their Devotion is commonly gone, as soon as the Chapter is ended. As it is barely Custom that moveth them; so a Flash of outward Profession, or a little Spice of Morality, satisfieth them. They build the Whole of their Religion upon the hollow Foundation of this dead Formality, and then flatter themselves into a vain Conceit of having done their Duty. Some are herein so punctual and strict, as to perform this Task Morning and Evening, which they will never omit, unless some pregnant Cause do obstruct it. Some have received this Customary Way of Reading from their Ancestors and Parents, and not only keep it up in their own Families, but hand it down also to their Children and following Generations.

§ 9. This Custom is often attended with many fatal Effects. As it carrieth in it an outward Appearance of Goodness, so it is apt to make an unwary Reader value himself upon his Performance. The worst is, there is no living Principle, no hearty Desire, or spiritual Hunger,

Hunger, going along with this Custom of Reading. The Word is neither inwardly digested, nor any substantial Food afforded thereby to the Mind. No sooner is this specious Custom finished in the Morning, but another Scene of Life is opened in the succeeding Part of the Day. This is spent in all manner of Vanity, trifling Conversation, Love of the World, temporal Concerns, and in a Word, in a State of carnal Security, without so much as one Thought turned to what was read in the Morning. The whole Bent of Life is now visibly influenced by the Spirit of this World, and the Manners of such Readers widely differ from what they appeared to be in the Morning. In short ; Their Life is a constant Contradiction to the whole Design of the divine Scriptures. To read the Scripture, or hear it read Morning and Evening, is laudable in itself ; but to rest there, and not improve what hath been read, is a Piece of dead Formality, and makes the Reader obnoxious to that terrible Sentence, " He shall be beaten with many " Stripes."

§. 10. Another false Step in Reading the Scripture is taken by those, who busy themselves and others with the various Opinions and Notions, both of the antient and modern Divines upon the Scripture. Such Men as these will run through large Composures, and, with unwearied Pains, search out the Opinion of such a Divine, Father and Teacher, as perhaps made some Figure in that Age wherein he lived. They think they have discovered no small Treasure when they can quote the Opinion of a great Man upon some difficult Place of Scripture, particularly if he seems to favour some Notion or other to which they are addicted. But as all those Efforts are full of Doubts or Uncertainties, so they leave the Reader just where he was before, that is, in the Sea of uncertain Opinions; it being impossible that the uncertain Notions of Men should beget a certain Faith in God, or influence the Mind with a Divine Conviction and Assurance.

§. 11. This Way of Reading the Scripture, doth much prevail among  
such

such Men as love to be called great Scholars, hard Students, and Critics in Divinity. It is generally attended with Self-Love, Ambition, Ostentation, and other Pharisaical Vices, that lurk under the plausible Pretence of Searching the Scriptures. It swells the Fancy with a World of critical Niceties, Disputes, and Contentions. Such a Man will search out all manner of Intricacies in Reading the Scripture, rather than nourish his Heart with such plain and practical Doctrines as are apparent to every one's View. To him may be fitly applied that of *Paul*: "They desire to be Teachers of the Law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm (d)." <sup>33</sup>

§. 12. Much of the same Temper are those that spend the Main of their Labour and Time, about those difficult Places of Scripture, which hitherto have proved too hard for the ablest Interpreters. Some gather up and compare the Opinions of others, whilst some bring in their own, and flatter themselves they have

(d) 1 Tim. i. 7.

have made such new Discoveries as were not known before. I dare say, it is almost a general Custom, that People will pry into great Curiosities, deep Mysteries, and hard Questions, rather than search into the inward State of their own Souls, in order to have this repaired, rectified, restored, and born again. The former of these Efforts is mainly a Work of the Memory, of the Head and Fancy; whereas the latter doth chiefly affect the Heart, and the interior Faculties of the Soul. But after all, such Readers ought well to consider the Saying of a pious Person: "Those that have a Reluctancy  
" to obey the first Elements of the In-  
" structions of God, cannot in Reason  
" pretend he should satisfy them about  
" the nicer Points of his Doctrine, and  
" of the whole Religion by him esta-  
" blished (e)."

§ 13. Another Method altogether insufficient to attain the End for which the Scripture is given, is the too general Way of Reading. Many can read whole Chapters, and delight too in one thing  
or

(e) LUDOLF's *Remains*, Page 59.



or other which offers itself to their View: But then they never come to a close and particular Application of the divine Truths they read. Or if at last they make some Application of the Word, they will make it to others, rather than to themselves. Thus they lose at once all the Benefit which else would accrue to their Souls from so sacred an Exercise. The same preposterous Way some will follow in Hearing of Sermons. If a Vice be publicly reproved, they are so far from applying the Word to themselves, that they will cast about in their Thoughts to find an Object where to fix it. Such an irregular Hearer or Reader, is like the Pharisee, who thought he did not need to make any Confession of Sin, but might justify himself, even before God, because he reckoned he was not as other Men were, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or Publicans. Whereas the best Christian will apply to himself the worst of Reproofs he hears or reads. He thinks within himself,

§. 14. “ Lord, I am guilty before  
 “ thee of all those Vices! The Seed of  
 “ the



“ the blackest and most detestable Crimes  
“ is lurking within my Breast! How  
“ many Heart-Sins, that never shew  
“ themselves abroad, do I harbour with-  
“ in me! What a Brood of sinful De-  
“ sires! What a Multitude of worldly  
“ Thoughts, and of corrupt Inclinations  
“ lodge within me! For though Men  
“ cannot arraign me for those inward  
“ Pollutions, yet Thou, O God, who  
“ art a Spirit, and searchest the inmost  
“ Springs of the Mind, findest me guilty  
“ of all those Crimes, and wilt call me  
“ to an Account in that Day, wherein  
“ the World shall be judged in Righte-  
“ ousness. What matter is it how strict  
“ I am in the Eyes of the World, if  
“ thy Spirit reproveth me of Sin, and  
“ if thy Law lays open that Filthiness  
“ of the Spirit which festers within, and  
“ infects my Will and Affections?”

§. 15. In this manner doth a sincere  
Christian apply every Word to Himself,  
before he presumeth to apply it to Others.  
He taketh first himself the healing Me-  
dicine of the Word, that he may after-  
wards the more effectually prescribe it to  
others.

others. If he be intrusted with a Cure of Souls, either in a public or more private Capacity, he doth then the more carefully follow this Method. Minister and School-master, Father and Mother, (who have all a Cure of Souls committed to them) ought first to apply the Word to themselves, before they administer it to those over whom they are set.

§. 16. Another Mistake committed in Reading the Scripture is, when a Man turns the Scripture into a Book of Moralities, and thinks he does enough, when, by his own Strength, he endeavours to live up to the same. Such a Reader is not like ever to gain a true Insight into the Fall of Man, and his Recovery by Jesus Christ. For as he hath but a slight Knowledge of the various Diseases of Man's Soul, it cannot be expected he should bear any great Regard to Jesus Christ, the Restorer of Nature. He thinks a little good Education and Conversation will fashion him into a very good Man, and quite take off what may seem rude and unmannerly in him.

He believeth that Scripture Morals and *Seneca's* Morals are all upon a Level, and he will perhaps relish the latter better than the former, since they are set off with greater Advantage for pleasing a Man's natural Taste. A little and slight Reformation will go a great Way with him, who seeth but little that wants to be reformed. The whole of his Religion is too much adapted to the Taste of the World. And as he squares his Actions by a set of shining Moralities, and refrains from the visible Pollutions of the World; so he will be apt to raise his own Esteem on the Vileness of those that openly wallow in the Mire of Corruption.

§ 17. To remedy this disorderly Way of Reading, a Man ought well to consider the principal End for which the Scripture is indited. The Scripture is written, not so much to make us externally good and sober, as to make us <sup>ss</sup> believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of <sup>ss</sup> God; and that believing we might have <sup>ss</sup> Life through his Name (*f*).<sup>ss</sup> Or as St Paul expresseth it, the Scripture is <sup>ss</sup> to make

" make us wise unto Salvation, through  
 " Faith which is in Christ Jesus, that the  
 " Man of God may be perfect, throughly  
 " furnished unto all good Works (g)."  
 This Faith in Christ is attended with many  
 marvellous Changes upon the Mind. It  
 is on Man's side the first and original  
 Principle, from whence Abundance of  
 Heavenly Operations do proceed. It re-  
 moveth the Soul out of the accursed Stock  
 of Nature, and transplants her into Jesus  
 Christ, as a Branch into the true Vine. By  
 Faith, a Man is made a new Creature ;  
 and this enduing him with a willing, free  
 and filial Spirit, his Works are thereby  
 rendered acceptable to God, since they  
 proceed no longer from Nature, but from  
 Grace, the leading Principle of a Chris-  
 tian's Life and Actions. In a Word :  
 The Death and Resurrection of Christ,  
 are the great Springs whence all Christian  
 Morals do constantly flow.

§. 18. Since therefore Jesus Christ is  
 the End and Scope of the divine Scrip-  
 tures, all our reading ought to be re-  
 solved into Him, and into those Effects  
 that proceed from a just Application of  
 his

(g) 2 Tim. iii. 15, 17.

his Death and Merits. He is <sup>ss</sup> the Lord  
<sup>ss</sup> our Righteousness, by whose Knowledge  
<sup>ss</sup> we ought to be justified (*b*).<sup>ss</sup> By the  
Knowledge of his Cross, we ought to  
<sup>ss</sup> crucify our Flesh, with the Affections  
<sup>ss</sup> and Lusts (*i*).<sup>ss</sup> By the Knowledge of his  
Death, we ought to be <sup>ss</sup> planted together  
<sup>ss</sup> in the Likeness thereof (*k*).<sup>ss</sup> By the  
Knowledge of his Burial, we ought to be  
<sup>ss</sup> buried with him into Death (*l*).<sup>ss</sup> By the  
Knowledge of his Resurrection, we ought  
to <sup>ss</sup> rise with him into a new Life, and to  
<sup>ss</sup> seek those Things which are above (*m*),  
<sup>ss</sup> being begotten thereby into a lively  
<sup>ss</sup> Hope (*n*).<sup>ss</sup> Upon the whole: <sup>ss</sup> For the  
<sup>ss</sup> Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ,  
<sup>ss</sup> we ought to count all Things Loss and  
<sup>ss</sup> Dung (*o*), and ought thereby to escape  
<sup>ss</sup> the Pollutions of the World (*p*).<sup>ss</sup>

§. 19. Another insufficient Way of  
reading the Scripture is, when a Man ac-  
quiesceth in some Flashes and Fits of De-  
votion, which will at Times start up in  
his Mind. The Scripture contains many  
moving

- |                             |                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| ( <i>b</i> ) Jer. xxiii. 6. | Isa. liii. 11.              | ( <i>i</i> ) Gal. v. 24. |
| ( <i>k</i> ) Rom. vi. 5.    | ( <i>l</i> ) Ver. 4.        |                          |
| ( <i>m</i> ) Col. iii. 1.   | ( <i>n</i> ) 1 Pet. i. 3.   |                          |
| ( <i>o</i> ) Phil. iii. 8.  | ( <i>p</i> ) 2 Pet. ii. 20. |                          |

moving Accounts, whereby a Man may be wrought up to violent Passions, either of Joy or Sorrow, of Fear or Hope, and the like. Thus some, when they read the History of the Sufferings of Christ, will be filled with Anger and Horror against those who so hainously murdered Him. When they read an Account of the Joys of Heaven, and of the Happiness of the World to come, they will seem so wonderfully affected therewith, as if they even enjoyed a Fore-taste of that blessed State. In a Word: They will be under a Transport of several Passions succeeding one another, as the Thread of the History leads them.

§. 20. But after all, if Things be duly considered, this Way of Reading the Scripture seems to be too light and uncertain. Any romantic Story, dressed up in an affectionate Manner, and set off with such Imbellishments as Art and Study can give it, will now and then leave the same Effect upon an unwary Reader, and deceive his Fancy into many violent Motions. Representations of that kind are apt to put a Man upon an eager Pursuit of Dreams  
and



and Fictions, and even fire his Passions with a delusive Influence. But whatever may be the Cause of these Passions, it is certain, they are at the best but so many heartless Emotions, that soon spring up, and soon die away again. They blow up the inferior Faculties into Hurry and Violence, but do neither enlighten the Understanding with substantial Knowledge, nor influence the Will with heavenly Love and Affections. But after all, we must not suppose that such a sacred Book as the Scripture is, should produce no better Effects than those. As it chiefly relateth to the Heart, and the interior Faculties of the Mind; so the Operation that proceedeth from it, mainly affects the Heart, and the noblest Powers of the Soul. It is strong and lasting, and diffusing itself through the whole Man, doth gradually transform him into an heavenly Temper of Mind.

§. 21. This Effect, I say, which the Word leaveth behind it, doth not work so much upon the Fancy and Humours of a Man, as upon the Will, and the nobler Faculties. And we ought to read

B

the



the Scripture with that very Intent, viz. to have our Understanding enlightened, and our Will sanctified by it. *Mary* pondered the Word in her Heart (*q*). *St Peter* bids us <sup>ss</sup> take heed thereunto, <sup>ss</sup> until the Day-star arise in our Hearts (*r*). The attending to this Word aright, doth beget us anew, enlighten and convert us (*s*). It <sup>ss</sup> maketh us bring forth fruit <sup>ss</sup> with Patience (*t*).<sup>ss</sup> *David* meditated in it, and <sup>ss</sup> whilst he mused, the Fire <sup>ss</sup> burned (*u*).<sup>ss</sup> He observed it with his <sup>ss</sup> whole Heart: It was a Lamp unto his <sup>ss</sup> Feet, and a Light unto his Path (*x*);<sup>ss</sup> it did not so much surprise him into some sudden Commotions, as soberly direct his Steps in the Path of Righteousness.

§. 22. Whoever therefore reads the Scripture with the Understanding only, and without any Regard to the Will and Affections, depriveth himself of the main Benefit, which otherwise he might reap from such a sacred Exercise. In a Word: The Scriptures must be read both with  
the

(*q*) Luke ii. 19.

(*r*) 2 Pet. i. 19.

(*s*) Jam. i. 18. Pf. xix. 7, 8. (*t*) Luke viii. 15.

(*u*) Pf. xxxix. 3.

(*x*) Psal. cxix. 34, 105.

the Understanding, and with the Will and Affections, if ever the Reader will obtain the End for which they were indited. This End, as hath been mentioned already, is to make a Man "wise unto " Salvation, thro' Faith in Jesus Christ." And since both Will and Understanding are corrupted by Folly, and know or perceive nothing of the Order of Man's Salvation, they want both to be made wise by the divine Scriptures. As the Word therefore enlightens the Understanding, and stores it with sound and Evangelical Doctrine; so it ought to form the Will into a ready Compliance with what the Understanding receiveth. And then undoubtedly all the other Affections of the Mind, will follow the Directions of the superior Faculties, and yield ready Obedience to the Word. This is the Way to have the Word inwardly digested, the inner Man begotten thereby, and the whole Concern of Religion settled on a good and lasting Foundation of Faith, Love, and Obedience, accompanied with a well-grounded and joyful Hope of Salvation, of eternal Life and Happiness.

§. 23. If this affectionate and savoury Method of Reading the Scriptures be neglected, or but slightly regarded, it is then no Wonder if in the midst of so much scriptural Light and Knowledge, to which we pretend, we are still blind and ignorant in the substantial Part of Religion. The Reading of the Scriptures barely with the Understanding, and at the same Time continuing in an unsanctified, disobedient, and refractory Will, is one of the Sources of Impiety in this Age, and of those strong Delusions that every where abound. And undoubtedly they will spread farther and farther, and involve us daily in greater Errors, except we prevent it, by proving obedient to the Word which we read. A Will inflaved by sinful Lusts, will in time render a Man unfit for the very Reception of the spiritual Light of the Gospel. For this Light shines only into a Soul that hath conquered (at least in some Degree) the violent Passions arising from Self-will and Self-love, and thereby gained Liberty to attend well to the kind Motions of the divine Spirit.

§. 24.

§. 24. Human Reason, though never so much refined, and adorned with all the Improvements Art and Study can give it, will yet fall short of a true Insight into spiritual Matters, whilst it remains void of the Principle of Grace. For an unregenerate Man, how ingenious, polite, and learned soever he be, will behold spiritual Things through a painted or false Glass, and hug his own Fancies and Images, instead of the divine Truth of the Gospel. The Reason is, that he is destitute of that Capacity or Fitness, which is necessary for the Knowledge of supernatural and spiritual Objects. Such a Man will, for want of better Light, commit various Mistakes in his Application to Souls: He will reconcile Christ with *Belial*, and the divine Word with the Lust of the Flesh.

§. 25. All these sinister Ends and false Steps that hitherto have been mentioned, must be wholly forsaken, if ever by the Reading of the Word we design to arrive to a sound and savoury Knowledge of heavenly Things. True Simplicity of Heart, that is, a sincere and unfeigned Desire to be "made wise unto Salvation,

“ through Faith which is in Christ Jesus,” is the best Preparative the Reader can bring to this sacred Study. And if it be attended with an unshaken Resolution, to order his whole Life and Conduct according to the Directions the Word proposeth, then he cannot fail of obtaining the End for which the Scripture is given. In short, this ought to be a Man’s Design, and whole Concern, that by Reading the Word he may become *truly good, pious, regenerate, and heavenly-minded*; or that he may have his whole Mind, Understanding, and Will, possessed with a true and unfeigned Sense of Religion. This Christian Intention being strongly imprinted upon the Reader, will inspire all his Thoughts and Actions, Words and Inclinations, with Heavenly-mindedness, and direct them to that great End for which the Oracles of God are committed to us.

§. 26. This practical Method of Reading the Scriptures, will still prove more profitable, if the Heart be prepared with a fervent and hearty Petition put up for a Blessing upon so sacred a Study. Nay the Reading itself ought to be accompanied

*for Reading the Scriptures.* 31

panied with continual Prayers, Thanksgivings, and Ejaculations, for divine Help and Illumination; this being the best Way to digest every Truth into substantial Knowledge, and to make us submit our Will to the revealed Will of God. [*See some Forms of Prayer hereafter subjoined; though the Spirit of God is not confined to one Way of Expression.*]

§. 27. The Reading of the Scripture must be attended with serious Meditation. For by Meditation a Man begins to taste the good Word of God, as the Apostle expresseth it (y). And such a truly pious Person delights and rejoices in the holy Scripture, so as to meditate thereon Day and Night, and more and more to relish the Sweetness of the divine Revelation. Meditation is a Means to suck divine Virtue and Sweetness out of every Flower, wherewith the Field of the Gospel is strewed. Though it be hard for a Beginner to fix his Thoughts on Objects wherewith they are but little acquainted, and to wean them from those whereon they have dwelt so long; yet Time and Industry will render it easy, and endear

B 4

the

(y) Heb. vi. 5.



the divine Law to him, " more than thou-  
 " sands of Gold and Silver." " Those that  
 " dig a Well, (to use the Comparifon of  
 " one of the Fathers) find ftill better Wa-  
 " ters as they pierce deeper into the Bow-  
 " els of the Earth; and the Mouth of the  
 " Well being widened by Labour and  
 " Application, will fend forth the Water  
 " in greater Abundance. So it is with the  
 " Well of the Holy Scripture. He that  
 " fearches into it by Meditation and Pray-  
 " er, will in Time feel the Rivers of  
 " Grace ftream down into his Heart."

§. 28. The Holy Scripture is like a Tree, every where laden with Plenty of sweet and favoury Fruit : And every Verfe of it may be compared to a Bough, or Branch of the fame fruitful Nature. Here every Bough ought to be shaken by itfelf, to try whether any Fruit will drop down into the Bosom of a hungry Soul. If the Reader doth not find in one Verfe wherewithal to fustain his fpiritual Life, he may then pafs on to another, and make Trial of that alfo. If he do but earneftly hunger after fome fpiritual Relief, the good Spirit of God will freely fupply him with fuch Food as fhall beft fuit his pre-  
 fent Condition.

§. 29.



§. 29. And after some Time spent in this practical Exercise, the Difficulties that first troubled the Reader, will be happily removed, and the Mind prepared for sweeter Enjoyments. He will go on every Day with greater Success, and will in Time discover in one Verse so rich a Variety of wholesom Fruits, as will make him even sit down under its Shadow, and fill his Hands with such Fruits as are most agreeable to the inward State of his Soul. But if, after all his Endeavours, some of those Fruits be still out of his Reach; I mean, if some Mysteries contained in Scripture be beyond his present Capacity, he is then to content himself with such as come within Reach, and leave the rest to another more seasonable Inquiry.

§. 30. God, who is faithful on his Side, will not be wanting to visit the Soul with various Probations and Trials, and by Means of them give her many delightful Insights into the most hidden Sense of the Scriptures. And therefore the Reader ought not to give over so sacred a Study, at the Sight of some Difficulties. For as perhaps in former Times he was never

used to a regular Way of Reading and Meditating, so at his first setting out in so untrodden a Path, he cannot but expect various Lets and Disappointments. But constant Exercise, accompanied with an humble Mind, and a Will contented with the present Measure of Light, will at last overcome all those Difficulties, and bring the Reader into a more pleasant and easy Path.

§. 31. As these Books are not penned after an ordinary Manner, so they require a more than ordinary Application to understand them. Nor are those dark Clouds that seem to hang over the Scriptures, unsuitable to the Wisdom of the divine Majesty. They are proper to create in us mean Thoughts of our own Abilities, and to convince us of the Necessity of a supernatural Light to direct us. They let us see how short-sighted we are in the mysterious Method of Man's Salvation, and how little we "understand of what" we read, except some Man do guide us;" which the devout Eunuch perceiving by his own Experience, desired St *Philip* to be his spiritual Guide, in *Acts* viii. 31. And our Saviour hath sent forth the Ministers of

of his Gospel, to instruct his People in the true Meaning of his written Word.

§. 32. But after all, (to use the Words of (z) a pious Writer) “ There are shining Passages enough in Scripture to light us the Way to Heaven, tho’ some unobvious Stars of that bright Sphere cannot be discerned without the Help of a Telescope. Since God then hath been pleased to provide sufficiently for our Instruction, what Reason have we to repine, if we have in a Book, not designed for us alone, provided also for those that are fitted for higher Attainments; especially since (if we be not wanting to ourselves) *those Passages, that are so obscure as to teach us nothing else, may at least teach us Humility?* ”

§. 33. To return: Prayer and Meditation ought to go Hand in Hand in Reading the Scripture. When your Meditation goes on but heavily, then endeavour to quicken it by Prayer and Supplication. And when your Prayer proveth faint and languid, then recur to Meditation, and revolve in your Mind some of those

(z) Mr BOYLE, *of the Style of Scripture*, p. 22.

those heavenly Instructions the Chapter affords. Whilst you are musing (a) on the Word, the Fire perhaps may kindle, and your Devotion recover Life. Or when an Opportunity offers, to confer with some Friend or other upon a spiritual Subject, that puzzleth the Mind, it may prove a Means to clear up your Doubts, and in some Measure revive those Graces that seemed to lie covered with the Ashes of Coldness and Indisposedness.

§. 34. Above all Things, be sincere and impartial in constant Examination of yourself, after the Reading of Scripture. If you read never so much, and neglect the Duty of Self-Examination, you are like the Hearer described by St *James*; (b) "He indeed beheld his Face in a Glass," and received some weak Impressions of the Word, but going his Way, "he straightway forgot what manner of Man he was," and made no farther Use of what he had heard. Of the same Nature were those Hearers mentioned in the Gospel, (c) who having heard the Word, went forth, and being choaked with Cares, and

(a) Psal. xxxix. 3.

(b) James i. 23.

(c) Luke viii. 14.

and Riches, and Pleasures of this Life, brought no Fruit to Perfection. The Word did no sooner affect their Thoughts, but it was gone.

§. 35. Such a Reader doth not <sup>ss</sup> ponder the Word in his Heart, <sup>ss</sup> with *Mary* (*d*); nor <sup>ss</sup> look steadily into the perfect Law <sup>ss</sup> of Liberty, <sup>ss</sup> by a diligent Search or Meditation; and so he must needs lose the Benefit of his Reading. By Self-Examination, the whole Nature, Inclinations, Manners, and Actions, must be impartially sifted. Not only the outward Actions are to be brought to a Trial, but also the Principle that produceth them. For as the Law is spiritual (*e*), so it doth not only require a Conformity of the outward Man to the divine Will, but also of the very Heart and Spirit. Again: As <sup>ss</sup> the Word of God is quick and powerful, <sup>ss</sup> and sharper than any two-edged Sword, <sup>ss</sup> piercing even to the dividing asunder of <sup>ss</sup> Soul and Spirit (*f*), <sup>ss</sup> so a Man's examining himself, must not be confined to the Manners and Actions, but reach to the very Springs from whence the Manners proceed.

§. 36.

(*d*) Luke ii. 19.

(*e*) Rom. vii. 14.

(*f*) Heb. iv. 12.

§. 36. A new Life being thus gradually raised by the Word, there is no doubt but that will influence all the Actions of a Man, and make them conformable to the divine Will. And it is then the Works favour of the Principle whence they flow. If a Man doth but faithfully practise what he knows, his Knowledge will certainly increase with his Practice, and his Path will shine more and more unto the perfect Day. The more he cleanseth himself from all Filthiness both of the Flesh and of the Spirit, the more will the divine Light display itself in his Soul, and the more solid will his Understanding prove in the Knowledge of Truth (*g*): As on the contrary, a Man that indulgeth himself in a profane Life, thereby darkens his Mind, and instead of an experimental and savoury (*b*) Knowledge, gathers in nothing else but a dead and literal Science of the Christian Religion. Whoever therefore despaireth of Success in this heavenly Study, or taketh but a slight and

(*g*) August. Lib. II. Cap. 7. de Doctr. Christ.  
*In tantum videmus, in quantum morimur huic seculo ;  
 in quantum autem huic vivimus, non videmus.* So far as we die to this World, we see ; but so far as we live to it, we are spiritually blind.

(*b*) Psal. xxxiv. 8.



*for Reading the Scriptures.* 39

and cursory View of the divine Commandments, which are exceeding *broad and wonderful* (i), may blame himself only, if he do not meet with any substantial Comfort in the Perusal of the inspired Writings.

§. 37. What hath been hitherto proposed for the profitable Reading of the divine Scriptures, will more fully appear when the *Plain Directions* here laid down are, by a few Instances, applied to the Business in Hand.

First then, the Reading of the Scriptures must be begun with hearty Prayer for obtaining that Aid or Assistance, which is necessary for making a saving Use and Improvement of the revealed Word. The Reader may use this, or any other good Form suggested to him.

*A Prayer before Reading the Scriptures.*

**M**OST merciful God, what Thanks can we return for the gracious Manifestation of thy Will, concerning the great Work of Man's Salvation! Thou  
hast

(i) Psal. cxix. 96, 18.

hast in thy Word declared the Means to rescue Mankind from the Dominion of Sin and Satan, and how by Repentance and Faith, we may here recover thy Love and Favour, and hereafter obtain eternal Life and Salvation.

Be graciously pleased to assist me with thy divine Spirit, when I am about reading thy Holy Word. Let him enlighten my Understanding, sanctify my Will, purify my Affections, guide me into all Truth, remember me of thy Precepts, shed abroad thy Love in my Heart, quicken me by his Presence, and animate me into a ready Performance of all such Duties as thy Word requireth !

Let him open my Eyes, that I may behold the wondrous Things of thy Law; and thy Commandments become more desirable to me than Gold, and much fine Gold. O let him kindle in my Soul the gentle Flame of a living Faith, and then nourish it up with the sincere Milk of the Gospel. I beseech thee, O infinite Goodness, to prepare me for so happy a State, by thy Word, which thou hast given me to make me wise unto Salvation, through Faith in Jesus Christ. Let me

*for Reading the Scriptures.* 41

me rejoyce in thy Law, learn the Way of thy Statutes, and keep it to the End; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

*Sometimes the following Prayer may be used.*

**L**ORD Jesus Christ, who art the great and only Teacher of Souls; give me thy Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, that with his own Finger he may write in my Heart thy Words, which are Spirit and Life.

Grant that I may effectually feel the Power of thy Word, for a thorough and intire Renewal of my Soul. Let me be begotten again by thy Gospel, as by incorruptible Seed, and let the Life of Grace be nourished up thereby as by sincere Milk. Open my Eyes, O Lord, that I may behold the Mysteries of thy Law, and may mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, for the Good of my Soul.

Let me never be a forgetful Reader; but so read, and meditate on thy Word, that my Understanding may be rescued thereby from Error, my Will from Disobedience, my Memory from sinful Impressions.

pressions, my Thoughts from Vanity, my Affections from all inordinate Pleasure, and my whole Life from conforming to a profane World.

Instruct me in that Wisdom which is from above, being pure and peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality and Hypocrisy. Thus shall my Soul, which is like a lost and wandering sheep, be led back into the Way of Truth, and kept by thy Power through Faith unto Salvation. *Amen.*

§ 38. It hath been hinted above, that the Reading of Scripture is to be accompanied with serious Meditation upon what we have read : Likewise with continual Prayers, Thanksgiving, and Ejaculations, as the best Way to convert every Truth into Edification. For Instance, take the first Words of *Genesis* ;

*In the Beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth.*

*Meditation.*

**H**OW great must God be, who by his Word hath created Heaven and Earth !

Since

*for Reading the Scriptures.* 43

Since Heaven and Earth is so great, so glorious and beautiful, how much greater and more glorious must God himself be who made them? He is infinitely greater than all the Creatures He hath produced. The very Heavens declare his Glory, and the Firmament sheweth his Handy-work.

*This Meditation may be thus turned into Prayer.*

**O** Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth! I thank thee for having taught me from whence Heaven and Earth have their Beginning. Grant that whenever I view this great Work of thy Hand, I may behold therein thy own Greatness and Majesty. Let me never adhere to the Creature with any inordinate Love, but to thee alone, who art the Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth. Whenever I lift up mine Eyes to the Heavens or cast them down towards the Earth, then put me in Mind of this thy Word, that I may duly honour and worship thee, who art the Creator of both Heaven and Earth.

Or

*Or thus.*

**D**E A R God! Since thou art the Creator of Heaven and Earth; thou must needs be better and more glorious than Heaven and Earth. Therefore let me never rest in any Creature, but in thee alone, who hast created them all. Let me never desire any Thing in Heaven or Earth besides Thee.

*Another Meditation upon the same Words.*

**G**OD hath created Heaven and Earth, and all Creatures contained therein. He hath also created *Me*, and fashioned all my Members. How great an Honour is it to be the Workmanship of Almighty God! What he hath created, he hath also preserved Thousands of Years, by the same Word that produced it. And as he preserveth the Whole, he doth also preserve every particular and individual Being.

*A Prayer.*

**A**Lmighty God, thou art the true Father, of whom the whole Family in Heaven and Earth is named; for  
thou



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thou alone hast made both Heaven and Earth. Teach me that I ought to look upon this my Body of Clay, this Lump of Earth, as the Workmanship of thy Hand; that so I may never abuse it to any Sin, nor prostitute it to sensual Lust and Pleasure, but employ it entirely in thy Service, who hast made, and hitherto preserved it.

*Or thus.*

DEAR Heavenly Father, how is it possible for me to be troubled with anxious Cares and Thoughts about the Maintenance of my Body, which thou hast created! Strengthen my Faith, O Lord, that with a filial Trust I may rely on thy fatherly Goodness, and firmly believe that thou wilt never leave me nor forsake me.

§. 39. According to the preceding Rules, the Duty of Self-Examination is constantly to accompany Prayer and Meditation. Self-Examination prepar-eth the Way for the Practice of what we have read, which is the very Crown and Top-stone of all our Studies in this Kind;

Kind. Self-Examination lays the Word to the Heart, and the Heart to the Word, and inquireth what Conformity the Heart beareth to the Word. The Word is the Model and Pattern into which the Heart is to be wrought by daily Self-Examination, till the Image of God be impressed thereon again. The Apostle speaks of a *Form of Doctrine* (i), to which, or into which we are delivered.

§. 40. "The Doctrine of the Gospel" (as a pious Divine (k) expresseth it) "has  
 " a transforming Power, to change or  
 " fashion Mens Minds into the Like-  
 " nefs of it, as the Mould doth the  
 " Metal that is cast into it: The Doc-  
 " trine of the Gospel is the Mould, and  
 " the Heart is the Metal, which when  
 " melted and cast into the Mould, re-  
 " ceiveth its Form and Figure." The  
 best Method therefore to facilitate the  
 Duty of Self-Examination, is to form  
 Questions out of such Places of Scrip-  
 ture as have been read and considered,  
 according to the Directions given above.  
 These Questions, when a Man puts  
 them

(i) Rom. vi. 17. (k) Mr Burkitt in Rom. vi. 17.

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them to himself, will make it appear, how far the Heart is cast into the Mould of the Word, and how much there is wanting of this divine Transformation of the Mind. But then he ought well to consider, that as the Word is a spiritual Word, the Examination which is to be made by it, must be of the same Nature, that is, spiritual and internal, not regarding so much the outward Act of Duty, as the inward Frame of Mind, from which the external Performance proceeds. This will more fully appear, when according to the Place quoted above, [*In the Beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth*] one maketh the following

SELF-EXAMINATION.

**D**ID I ever duly consider, from whence Heaven and Earth have their first and original Being; or have I passed over in a careless Manner so great a Work of God's own Hands? Did I ever admire the omnipotent Power of the Creator, "who hath called those Things which are not, as though they  
<sup>as</sup> were,

<sup>ss</sup> were, *Rom. iv. 17.* and hath framed  
<sup>ss</sup> the Worlds by his Word ?<sup>ss</sup>

Have I perhaps admired the Heavens more than my Father who is in them ? Have I loved the Creature more than God, who made it ? Hath the Viewing of the Heavens raised my Mind to heavenly Thoughts and Contemplations ; and have I even now my Conversation in Heaven, where I for ever desire to be ?

The Heavens and the Earth had a Beginning, and will pass away again in God's own Time : Have I then duly considered, that my Heart is not to be fixed on Heaven, or Earth, or any perishing Creature, but on God alone, with whom there is no such Variableness ?

The blessed Trinity hath created Heaven and Earth, and myself also, who am a small Particle of God's Creation : Have I therefore remembered my Creator from the Days of my Youth, and humbly worshipped Him, from whom I have my very Life and Being ? ~

Have I ever yielded my Members, being Part of God's Creation, to the Service of Lust and Vanity ; or have

*for Reading the Scriptures.* 49

I constantly used them to the Glory of God, who hath made and preserved them?

Did I ever, by viewing the natural Creation, elevate my Mind to that spiritual Creation, whereby a new Heart is created, and a new Spirit is put within us?

God hath made the Heavens, and adorned them with Sun and Moon, and other bright and glorious Bodies: And have I not too often abused the Light thereof, in sinning ungratefully by the Benefit and Direction of their Light, against their Creator, and mine?

Hath God created the Earth, and all the Creatures contained therein? Truly he created them for no other End, than to promote his own Glory thereby: have I always used the Creatures to this End; or have I by Pride and Luxury, by Lust and Vanity, subjected them still to greater Bondage, and thereby frustrated the End designed by the Creator?

Did I ever consider, that as by the Word of God, the Light was brought forth out of Darkness; so in the new Creation, a thorough Sense of my own Corruption and Darkness, must preceed the State of divine Illumination? &c.

§ 41. It is certain that by such and the like Enquiries, a Man may in Time learn the Duty of Self-Examination\*, the Practice whereof is so useful in every Respect, and so necessary in Reading the Scripture, that no great Progress in the spiritual Life can be made without it. The divine Writings being *exceeding broad*, and abounding in heavenly Sense, will afford copious Matter for so pious an Exercise. Now and then one Verse will open a large Field for Meditation and Self-Examination.

All must be concluded again with a hearty Prayer for divine Blessing upon this Work.

*A*

\* See Short Heads of Self-examination, for the Assistance of those who practice that Duty, *Printed for J. and W. OLIVER, N<sup>o</sup> 12, Bartholomew-Close.*



*A PRAYER after the Reading of the  
Holy Scriptures.*

**O** Infinitely holy and gracious God,  
I render thee hearty Thanks for  
the Manifestation of thy Word, and for  
the Means of Grace therein described,  
proposed and offered to us. Thy Word  
discovers to me the Evil of Sin, that  
hath overspread my Soul; and the  
Evil of Punishment, which will cer-  
tainly be inflicted on the Transgressors.  
Sin hath corrupted my Heart, dark-  
ned my Understanding, infected my  
Will. It hath polluted my Memory,  
defiled my Imagination, raised my  
Reason against the Obedience of Faith,  
and hath made me yield my Members  
Servants to Iniquity unto Iniquity. I  
have been miserably deceived by think-  
ing myself Innocent, for refraining from  
grosser Acts of Impiety: Whereas, thy  
Law, diffusing its spiritual Light through  
my Soul, teacheth me, that all the  
Imaginations of my Heart are evil, and  
only evil continually.

Let this Word which I have now  
read, have a blessed Effect upon me!  
Let it shew unto me my Fall in *Adam*,

and my Restoration in Christ. Strengthen my Faith, that I may rely on the Word of thy Gospel, and be thereby born again into a lively Hope, and cleansed from all Filthiness of the Flesh and Spirit. Let me never rest in an external Performance of a few religious Duties, but grant that I may inwardly digest thy Word, and that the sanctifying Effect thereof may diffuse itself through Soul and Body, Will and Understanding, Thoughts and Desires, Life and Actions.

Enable me by thy Spirit faithfully to do thy Will, and to establish my whole Religion upon the safe Foundation of thy Word. Have Compassion also upon all those that sit as yet in Darkness, and in the Shadow of Death, and guide them by thy Word into the Way of Life and Peace! *Amen.*

#### ASPIRATION.

**T**OUCH, O Lord, my Heart with a Coal from thy Altar, when I read thy Word. Melt it by the Word of thy Law into real Sorrow for my Sins and then seal it with a Sense of th  
Remission

Remission of them declared in thy Gospel.

2. O Lord, I am blind by Nature, and altogether unable to find that Pearl of great Price the Gospel proposeth. The Treasure of thy Kingdom is hid under the Mystery of the Cross, and revealed to those only whose Eye is made single by Faith and Obedience.

3. O Lord, heal the Eye of my Soul, and give me a spiritual Sight; that I may see the wondrous Things of thy Law: Heal my Ear, that I may hear thy Word, and obey it: Heal my Taste, that thy Word may be sweeter to me than Honey, and the Honey-comb: Heal my Reason, that it may prove no longer refractory to the Work of Faith: Heal my Will, that I may keep thy Commandments; and heal my Understanding, that I may see the marvellous Order of our Salvation, exhibited in thy Word.

4. As Men do not put new Wine into old Bottles, but into new, to preserve them both; so grant that I may never presume to receive the Mysteries of thy Kingdom with a corrupt and unregenerate Heart.

5. Alas! most merciful Lord, the natural Man, such as he is after the Fall, with all his Wit and Parts, his Reason and Learning, and all native and acquired Accomplishments, doth not receive and embrace, but resist and reject the Motions and Teachings of thy divine Spirit. Let this Consideration humble me before thee, O Lord; and grant that I may be enlightened from above, renewed and born again by thy Spirit, to apprehend spiritual Truths with a spiritual Will and Understanding.

§. 42. One that hath never been used to the serious Study of the holy Scriptures, which yet is the Duty of all Christians, will be too apt to think, that such a Method as is here before described is very inconvenient, especially for the Unlearned, who will find it both difficult and tedious. But it should be considered,

1. That the Difficulty will be lessened by degrees, more and more, as the pious Reader goeth on constantly with this holy and profitable Exercise. The more he is used to it, the better he will be able to perform it. Also he may take some good,

good, pious and judicious Commentary, or Exposition, to help him in the Understanding of such Texts as require that Help. Or he may desire Information from his spiritual Pastor, or some other judicious Friend; as hath been already hinted above in §. 31, and 33. The divine Grace and Benediction will not be wanting to render the foregoing Rules practicable at first, and familiar and easy at length. And no one who makes the Experiment, will find his Time and Labour lost. But then he must persevere in the Study of the divine Oracles as long as he lives. So an unlearned Person, of small or dull Capacity, and weak natural Parts, though beginning with slow Understanding and Barrenness of Thought, may with divine Assistance, improve gradually in Meditation and Prayer, beyond Expectation, beyond all meer human Probability or Power. Such a one may be contented to meditate and pray at first, with never so few Sentences or Words, till he or she can perform more and better by little and little, taking at first such Texts or Passages of the written Word to meditate and pray over,

over, as are plainest and easiest to their Understanding, before they attempt any that are more difficult. And it is well known, that the most necessary and important Texts are the most plain and easy to be understood. Wherefore no Christian will be at a Loss, to find still such Matter of Meditation and Prayer, in reading the holy Scriptures, as will be suitable to his or her present Capacity, Necessity and Use. And in the Choice of such practical and remarkable Places of the holy Scriptures, good Help is offered in several Tracts (1), which it will be worth the Reader's while to peruse.

2. Though it may seem tedious to read in such an exact and slow Method, as hath been proposed, so that one's whole Life-time would suffice to read but a few of the sacred Books at that Rate; yet that Objection will fall to the Ground, when we resolve to use Prudence in this important and necessary Work.

(1) See the Reverend Mr BLACKWELL's *Several Methods of Reading the holy Scriptures in private*: And the Reverend Mr OSTERVALD's *Necessity and Usefulness of Reading the holy Scriptures*. — Both printed for JOHN RIVINGTON.



Work. For although such particular Meditation and Application, with Prayer, cannot be allotted to all that is read, it may to such Passages or Sentences, as are most suitable and applicable to the Condition and Circumstances of each Reader; while the rest is only read attentively, in order as it stands in the several Books. Which Method may well prevent all Tedioufness, and be attended both with Expedition, and with Delight.

§. 43. Also it will be very profitable for all Christians that have Families, carefully to keep up the Reading of the holy Scriptures, as well as all other good and religious Exercises, in their several Houses. Which should be done especially on the Lord's Day. And the Head of each Family will do well, with the Help of some good and sound Exposition, to explain and apply practically to them under his Care what hath been read; giving Leave and Encouragement to Children and Servants, to ask Questions for their better Information, and to make some Observations according to their Ability. So they may improve considerably

considerably in Piety and Knowledge; wherein the primitive Christians were very eminent; as Dr CAVE sheweth in his Treatise, intitled, *Primitive Christianity*, Part I. Ch. 9. with an Account of their Fidelity and Diligence in studying the holy Scriptures themselves, and instructing such young Persons as were under their Care in the Principles of Religion. And pious Parents, Masters and Mistresses, will find it infinitely worth their while, to imitate those faithful and zealous Servants and Disciples of our great Master and Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ. For so they will obtain the Blessing of God upon themselves and their Families, and promote the temporal and eternal Happiness of both.

§. 44. Now it may not be improper to conclude with a Paragraph or two, out of that celebrated System of Practical Divinity, *The Whole Duty of Man*, Chap. ii.

“ Fourthly, We are to express our  
 “ Reverence to God, by honouring his  
 “ Word; and this we must certainly  
 “ do, if we do indeed honour him,  
 “ there

*for Reading the Scriptures.* 59

“ there being no surer Sign of our de-  
“ spising any Person, than the setting  
“ light by what he says to us ; as on  
“ the contrary, if we value one, every  
“ Word he speaks will be of Weight  
“ with us. Now this Word of God is  
“ expressly contained in the holy Scrip-  
“ tures, the Old and New Testament,  
“ where he speaks to us, to shew us his  
“ Will and our Duty. And therefore  
“ to this Word of his we are to bear a  
“ wonderful Respect, to look upon it  
“ as the Rule by which we must frame  
“ all the Actions of our Life ; and to  
“ that End, to study it much, to read  
“ it as often as we can ; if it may be,  
“ never to let a Day pass us without  
“ reading, or hearing some Part of it  
“ read.

“ But then that is not all : We must  
“ not only read, but we must mark  
“ what we read ; we must diligently  
“ observe, what Duties they are which  
“ God commands us to perform, what  
“ Faults they are which God there  
“ charges us not to commit ; together  
“ with the Rewards promised to the  
“ one, and the Punishment threatned

“ to

“ to the other. When we have thus  
“ marked, we must lay them up in our  
“ Memory; not so loosely and carelessly,  
“ that they shall presently drop out  
“ again; but we must so fasten them  
“ there by often thinking and medi-  
“ tating on them, that we may have  
“ them ready for our Use. Now that  
“ Use is the directing of our Lives;  
“ and therefore whenever we are tempt-  
“ ed to the committing of any Evil,  
“ we are then to call to Mind, this is  
“ the Thing which in such a Scripture  
“ is forbidden by God, and all his Ven-  
“ geance threatned against it. And so  
“ in like manner, when any Opportu-  
“ nity is offered us of doing Good, to  
“ remember, this is the Duty which I  
“ was exhorted to in such a Scripture,  
“ and such glorious Rewards promised  
“ to the doing of it: and by these Con-  
“ siderations strengthen ourselves, for  
“ Resistance of the Evil, and Perform-  
“ ance of the Good.”

10 FE 58

F I N I S.